R E P O R T R E S U M E S

ED 012 739 UD 003 965

EVALUATION OF THE NEW YORK STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT CONFERENCE NUMBER 2. (TITLE SUPPLIED).

BY- POPKIN, RICHARD H.

PUB DATE APR 67

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.25 HC-$0.20 5P.

DESCRIPTORS- EVALUATION, *CONFERENCES, *EDUCATION, *DISADVANTAGED YOUTH, CULTURAL DIFFERENCES, TEACHERS, EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVES, MIDDLE CLASS CULTURE, MIDDLE CLASS VALUES, MINORITY GROUPS, *SUBCULTURE, AMERICAN CULTURE, ETHNIC GROUPS, NEGRO HISTORY, SOCIAL ATTITUDES, SOCIAL CHANGE, *EDUCATIONAL CHANGE, MORAL VALUES, NEW YORK

EDUCATORS ARE NOT ADEQUATELY FINDING WAYS TO DEAL WITH THE DISADVANTAGED IN AMERICA. THEY ASSUME THAT THEY MUST MAKE THE DISADVANTAGED CONFORM TO AND FUNCTION IN THE DOMINANT MIDDLE-CLASS SOCIETY. HOWEVER, WHILE THE MIDDLE CLASS SEEMS TO FAVOR A HOMOGENIZATION OF ALL CULTURES, SOME MINORITY CULTURES RESIST THIS PRESSURE AND FAVOR A SOCIETY IN WHICH THEY CAN MAINTAIN THEIR IDENTITY AND BE EQUAL. IN AMERICA, A MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY, THE DOMINANT CULTURE OPPRESSES THE SUBCULTURES RATHER THAN ENCOURAGING THE "FLOWERING" OF A MULTICULTURE. ISLAMIC SPAIN IS AN EXAMPLE OF A SOCIETY IN WHICH DIVERSE GROUPS COEXISTED, AND EACH GROUP WAS ABLE TO MAKE PRODUCTIVE CULTURAL CONTRIBUTIONS. A SOCIAL REVOLUTION IS NEEDED TO CREATE SUCH A SOCIETY IN AMERICA, BUT EDUCATORS FAIL TO RECOGNIZE THIS AND CONTINUE TO MAKE CONSERVATIVE EFFORTS TO PRESERVE PRESENT MIDDLE-CLASS VALUES. THEY OFFER SOLUTIONS TO PROBLEMS WHOSE BASIC CAUSE THEY, IN FACT, DO NOT RECOGNIZE. BEFORE ADVANCING THESE SOLUTIONS, THEY FIRST SHOULD MAKE FUNDAMENTAL DECISIONS ABOUT WHAT THEY HOPE TO ACCOMPLISH. (NH)

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EVALUATION of the New York State Education Department Conference, Number 2

Dr. Richard H. Popkin

Professor of Philosophy,
Chairman, Department of Philosophy,
Duke

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When I came here I knew that I knew nothing about the subject that was being discussed. I think I was chosen because it was supposed that I was an unprejudiced party. But I think that I am also a quite prejudiced party in that I come from a subculture that is constantly attacking education professors and schools of education. For years, I have been fighting the influence of professional educators in universities, and recently have been on a committee at the University of California that approves all advanced programs within the university. My function has usually been to fight every proposal made by a department of education. I am sorry to report that I usually lost.

With my prejudices revealed, let me turn to the conference. I was able to attend only about half of the sessions, roving back and forth among them. My first reaction to what I heard was that all the canards about professional educators are not canards; they are true. For I kept hearing over-simple solutions to complex problems, attempts to formulate one-sentence solutions to monumental questions, clichés and platitudes. The greater part of what I heard I found unbelievable. Some of the research sounds trivial and some of its sounds as though it is searching to find out the obvious. I was amazed that it has taken so long to investigate some of these matters, such as the reading problems of disadvantaged children, bilingual problems, the relations of home environment to what goes on in school. I was also impressed or oppressed by the lack of awareness of similar problems in other societies. I was very surprised, considering how much of the discussions centered on what happens to minority groups in our culture, that in the discussions Hawaii was not brought up as a laboratory case of what apparently can be done to avoid the problems that seem to be occurring all over the rest of the United States. I was surprised that other cultures which have bilingual problems have not been studied, at least for comparison's sake, cultures such as Belgium or French Canada. I was surprised that Israel was not discussed for its attempts to bring children from outside cultures into an official culture.

There is something about being an outsider at somebody else's conference that makes one suddenly aware of what must be true of one's own conferences. The conference is becoming part of our world; it is becoming a subculture, and I know people who almost literally do nothing but go to conferences. The conference is becoming a way of not solving problems. It is becoming an academic disease which is not designed to solve problems, but seems to be more designed to keep the people who might solve the problems from wrestling with them; keeping a new advantaged culture constantly in flight, talking to each other, but not getting down to the real business of dealing with the problems. I hope some sociologist or anthropologist will study what effects this is having on the learned world. So much of its talent is being drained off to fly to different parts of the world to talk to each other and themselves, leaving assistants home to do the work they themselves should be doing. In my own field and in scientific fields I think there will be disastrous results in another decade when all the people who have the best training stop doing any work except going to see each other to read the same canned speech every place they go.

To get to more serious matters, I find it difficult to react to the content of the conference on such short notice. I have not had a chance to read the speeches, or to study them. I have never read the articles that are referred to, and have neither had a chance to reflect very deeply or to examine my reflections; so, all this has been put together in very fast order. It would have helped *me*, at least, if the sessions had been reversed in order, as the ones I went to today seemed to be much more theoretical and the ones I went to yesterday much more specific and practical. Thus, my reaction was formed in reverse order from what I might have liked it to be.

In general, my reaction was similar to cultural shock. It started when I went to the section on cultural shock yesterday afternoon. I have remained in shock ever since. The shock to me was that a monumental problem was being dealt with by trivial means. Most of the sessions sounded to me like series of attempts to drain the ocean with eye-droppers, trying to solve the problem of what has happened and is happening to the people we call the disadvantaged by using new books, by taking them on field trips, by taking teachers on field trips, by giving a course in Negro history. None of this appears to me to get to the heart of the issue. Maybe this is because my own professional field is the history of skepticism. I have gotten sufficiently infected with my field so that as soon as I hear any solutions I immediately become doubtful that they are solutions, or even that the problem that they are designed to solve is the real problem.

Starting with the first session down to the last one I attended this morning, a question kept arising in my mind. What is the problem to be solved? Is this really the problem that needs solution? I came to realize in the course of two days that there is a tremendous distance between theoretical reflection and analysis and the immediate practical problem. People are being trained today to teach in P.S. 127. When they get there they have to do something. There is a tremendous practical problem of what should be done, right this minute. New teachers have to be told what they have to do next September when they get into the school room. I assume that many of the practical problems I heard about are soluble, that there are experts to decide what textbooks to use, what field trips or arts and crafts will help. But, I don't know whether that is the general problem we are trying to solve. Much of what I heard assumed that the problem was how to make the disadvantaged children able to function in a dominant white middle-class society and how we can try to educate people to accomplish this. I want to raise the question of whether this is what we really want, and whether this is what the so-called disadvantaged really want. The assumption seems to run through a good deal of the discussion that *our* culture is what "they" should be made part of and we can help by teaching teachers about *their* culture so that the teachers can lead them, in the classical sense of "education" (educare = to lead out), into our culture. Our educational system is designed to train people to function in various roles and to develop themselves within our culture. Yet we find ourselves confronted with people who are living, at least in part, in other cultures: Mexicans, Orientals, Puerto Ricans, Negroes, Jews, Catholics and so on. What we seem to want to achieve is to homogenize everybody. It appears to me that the other cultures, the minority cultures, are not striving to be absorbed by the majority. What they want is co-equality. They want the right to function and to continue to develop within the American world.

Throughout American history some minority cultures have been extremely resistant—the Indians and the Mexicans, for instance. Some have been extremely pliable, like the Jews. Some have been placed in what appears to me to be an utterly hopeless situation. Negroes, no matter what they do, cannot find out who

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they are, where they come from, how they got here, how they got into their mess. When we find out all this, then we will teach them to behave like us, even if we still exclude them from our culture. And, when one looks through the history of our culture, we find that even the most homogenized are still partially excluded to some degree. I saw that Gov. Agnew of Maryland was the first person of Greek origin to become a state executive in America. It was pointed out when Gronouski became Postmaster General, he was the first Pole to ever make it. When Celebrezze got in the Cabinet, he was the first Italian to make it. We still have to take cognizance of the fact that even the most assimilating cultures are just beginning to be allowed in a little bit. At each step forward we still know who comes from each group, even if we can not always tell from the name. Somebody is still keeping track so that the *New York Times* can inform us that we now have the first Greek serving as a governor in an American state.

What do we really want? What we seem to have, in fact, is not a culture, along with disadvantaged subcultures, but in fact a multi-culture in which most of the cultures are being oppressed by a basically white, Anglo-Saxon, Germanic Protestant, middle-class culture. The other cultures are suddenly being noticed because they are becoming problems, partly because their values are sneaking into the dominant culture and partly because their reaction is becoming disruptive to the majority culture. One solution is, of course, to homogenize everybody as most European national cultures did. If this is a solution, I think that one has to look at how it has been done, and then decide whether we are willing to pay the price for it. We tried it with the Indians—the pressure of assimilation and extermination. When one looks at what the European national cultures accomplished, by and large they achieved the "final solution" of most of the minority groups that were living there when their culture became dominant. But, even in England, France, Holland and others, there are still disruptive minority groups left over like the Welsh, like the Frieslanders, like the Bretons, who refuse to learn the language, refuse to give in. The European cultures are constantly faced with the problem of how to assimilate people after they have given up trying to exterminate them. American history indicates, that with the exception of the Indians, the European model has not been taken seriously here, at least not the western European model.

If we want to profit from and prosper from our situation, then we should be trying to achieve the flowering of our multi-culture. What we do should be designed to make everyone realize the co-equality, the importance and the value of each culture within an overall political system. We should all learn to function in a multi-culture, linguistically, intellectually and culturally. We have managed to do this on a trivial gastronomical level by eating pizzas and gefülte fish, but what we need is to learn to do it seriously, so that each person can function within his own culture in a world that *is* a common world.

The problem is neatly illustrated by the proposals I have heard about giving a course in Negro history. I heard suggestions that potential teachers should take such a course. It would be very nice as they would then know who they were teaching, where these people came from and so on. What I think is a basic flaw in this suggestion is that it is set forth as if there is a course that everybody takes called "American History" that starts at Jamestown and Plymouth Rock and runs up to LBJ and Vietnam, and then there is something else called "Negro History" which deals with where those people came from and what they have been doing all these years. I have been fighting this kind of battle for about ten years on the problem of Jewish history. There is a similar fight and a similar development going on on that front, in that each minority has the need to prove that it has been part of a developing, meaningful world, that it has not been excluded from it, that it has not been hiding from it, that it has not been under a rock somewhere, but that it has been genuinely participating in what the human race has achieved up to this point.

The majority unfortunately usually writes the histories. The victors write books about how they won, how important it is that they won and how great they are because they have won so that history usually turns out to be about the majority and its importance. It has been vital for the Jewish minority to realize their intimate involvement in western history. The same is true for every other minority, for the Negroes as well as the whites. We all have to realize that what we have developed in America is the result of everybody who is here. It still seems to me an amazing fact that it takes so long for the majority to admit information that has been known all along; for instance, to recognize that there were free Negroes participating in the development of America long before Jamestown, that Coronado's expedition was led by a Negro, and also by a Jew. (It was led by a Negro because he was the only one of the leaders of the expedition who had actually been in North America before. He had come on an earlier expedition to Florida.) There was a Negro commander in Mexico in Cortez's time. All this is not information that takes much time and effort to ferret out. Then why is it so hidden? I think it is because facts about minorities just do not make sense to the majority; they do not help account for how the majority managed to make this country what it is. What is really needed is not a course in Negro history, or Jewish history or Mexican history, but a course in American history as the history of all of the cultural groups that managed to make up America, all of the groups whose achievements, failings and suffering have created our present world.

We are all here. We all have to see our world as one that we all really belong to. A multi-cultural orientation is needed, not just for teachers but also for our society.

We live in a society that is torn between two views; the dominant cultural view that the white, Anglo-Saxon, middle-class society should predominate and that other people, if they behave themselves, should be allowed to pass into it, providing they have become civilized by our educational system and by other means. On the other hand, the many cultures in our society cry for cultural co-equality. We face the choice between the old dream of the melting pot in which you get the homogeneous stew or the possibility of many pots on the same stove. Up to now our society has been unwilling to decide which it wants; whether it wants to continue as the white, Anglo-Saxon society with minorities being absorbed into it at varying rates depending on the color of their skins, their religions and other factors, or whether it should recognize that the multi-culture is not only what we have but what we should have.

If we opt for a multi-culture then our whole education and our rearing have to be changed. Our attitudes toward fellow citizens can no longer be patronizing or designed to make them alike in one image. Our society has to be changed to end the oppression of other cultures by the dominant culture. The focus would then have to be on what can lead to a flowering of each culture. We've modeled ourselves on the monolithic national cultures of western Europe. We study the history of England, the history of France, the history of Germany, but not the history of the multi-cultures such as medieval Islamic Spain, the Ottoman Empire, the Austria-Hungarian empire, Hawaii and other societies in which many groups have co-existed. In fact, we have the historical orientation that the multi-cultures were wretched unproductive societies. Islamic Spain is thought of as a dreary world in which Christians were constantly persecuted. The Ottoman Empire is believed to have been full of bloody butchers. Hawaii is thought of as a peaceful place where nothing is accomplished. At the same time one of our major problems has been dealt with more successfully in the multi-cultures. Islamic Spain was a most amazing case. They did have a society that for more than five

hundred years had several competing cultures co-existing without much slaughter and persecution, a society in which each of the cultures was able to produce great contributions in science and arts and letters.

If we can re-examine what our motives are, and what our orientation should be, I think we could get a different perspective and train a new society toward different goals. An educational system has both a conservative and a revolutionary ingredient. It is conservative in that it is designed to preserve the achievements and values of the society and culture. At the same time, whenever it tries to do this, it seems to be revolutionary in providing the very means of challenging these achievements and values.

Most of what I have heard at the conference has been conservative in character—how to preserve middle-class values by passing them on to the so-called disadvantaged. A system can become revolutionary by challenging these values and by showing that there are other meaningful ones. When Negro history, Jewish history, etc., lead to American history as the historical understanding and appreciation of all Americans, all made in His image, we may have an intellectual and spiritual revolution. At the same time, we obviously need a social revolution. The dominant culture has been able to sit on the minorities, oppress them without many qualms for a long, long time. It continues to do so rather than make even minimal sacrifices that would allow other cultures to develop.

The social revolution will occur when the majority is willing or the minorities press hard enough. Until then, any educational reforms prolong the mad world designed to prevent solution of the problems of the disadvantaged, a mad world in which 25 billion dollars a year and monumental efforts are going into blowing up Vietnam's inhabitants but ways and means cannot be found to allow Negroes to have decent housing. When the real goals have been decided upon, then technical means can generally be pressed into service to reach them. A conference like this seems to me to be operating in limbo. We first have to decide what we want to do, what we want our world to be like and what it ought to be like, and then we may be in a position to apply ourselves to bringing it about. Instead, much of what I have heard seems to have been dedicated to the practical without any direction. The fundamental question that has to precede all this is why, what are you trying to accomplish with this and is what we are trying to accomplish what we want to accomplish.

We need a vision and a commitment to it. Then education can both preserve our heritages and lead us in a revolutionary way to something we might genuinely call "A Great Society," a society in which many cultures may flower and bring forth the greatness of the human spirit. Without overall desire to solve the problems of other cultures in a constructive way, we will wallow forever in the symptoms but not cure the disease, the sickness of our society.

I have been told occasionally in the last two days when I have griped in the corridors, at least it's all well-intentioned. The history of mankind is full of well-intentioned failures, because people solved a practical problem without knowing why or wherefore. If we decide and mean it, that what we want is a world in which each person can be his own individual image of God within the cultural context in which he can best develop, then maybe we can try to bring it about. As educators perhaps we can lead a revolutionary movement and carry it through to achieve a better world. Then maybe America can find its soul, and become worthy of its predominant place in the world.